Forces of Change Assessment At-A-Glance

The Forces of Change Assessment is designed to help MAPP participants answer the following questions: "What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?" and "What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?"

During this phase, participants engage in brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying forces — such as trends, factors, or events — that are or will be influencing the health and quality of life of the community and the local public health system. The forces identified through this process — together with the results of the other three MAPP Assessments — will serve as the foundation for the next MAPP phase — Identify Strategic Issues.

Recommended Participants and Roles:
?? <u>Core Support Team or subcommittee</u> — designs and prepares for the Forces of Change brainstorming process and compiles and records the results of the session.
?? <u>MAPP Committee</u> — conducts the brainstorming process. Additional participation from key leaders in the community may be recruited but should not be necessary if committee membership is sufficiently diverse.

A Step-by-Step Overview of the Forces of Change Assessment:
1. Prepare for the Forces of Change Assessment by identifying a facilitator and location and designing the session. Give each MAPP Committee member a copy of the Brainstorming Worksheet to use in preparation for the discussion.
2. Conduct a brainstorming session with the MAPP Committee and other participants. Develop a comprehensive list of forces of change by asking participants to focus on events, trends, and factors that come easily to mind. Then simplify and categorize the list.
3. Identify possible impacts — potential threats and opportunities — for each force. Add new forces to the list as they become apparent.

Forces of Change Assessment

Introduction to the Forces of Change Assessment
During the Forces of Change Assessment, participants answer the following questions: "What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?" and "What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?" The Forces of Change Assessment should result in a comprehensive, but focused, list that identifies key forces and describes their impact.

Responding to the questions above requires a balanced approach. On one hand, it is necessary to think broadly when identifying events, factors, and trends that represent major forces. Local, regional, national, and global concerns should be considered. On the other hand, it is necessary to focus on specific issues that affect the local public health system as well as the health and quality of life of the community.

Identifying and addressing forces of change — often called "environmental scanning" — is important to the success of the process. It ensures that the process: is relevant and timely, builds upon opportunities, and responds to potential threats. The identification of forces illuminates some of the "givens" under which the public health system operates or will need to operate. If these forces are not fully considered, the strategies developed later in the MAPP process may be less effective.

The process of conducting a Forces of Change Assessment also has strong benefits for the working relationships of public health system partners. This phase promotes thinking about the "big picture." These activities often bring partners together on common ground and encourage them to think about how to collaboratively address changes.

What Are Forces of Change?
While it may not seem obvious at first, the broader contextual environment is constantly affecting communities and local public health systems. State and federal legislation, rapid technological advances, changes in the organization of health care services, shifts in economic and employment forces, and changing family structures and gender roles are all examples of Forces of Change. They are important because they affect — either directly or indirectly — the health and quality of life in the community and the effectiveness of the local public health system.

Forces are a broad all-encompassing category that includes trends, events, and factors.
- ✍ **Trends are patterns over time**, such as migration in and out of a community or a growing disillusionment with government.
- ✍ **Factors are discrete elements**, such as a community's large ethnic population, an urban setting, or the jurisdiction's proximity to a major waterway.
- ✍ **Events are one-time occurrences**, such as a hospital closure, a natural disaster, or the passage of new legislation.

Traditional strategic planning approaches often divide forces into four common categories: political, economic, social, and technological (PEST). Other strategic

planning experts have added environmental, scientific, legal, and ethical categories to the PEST list. Some forces may have a direct or indirect relationship to social determinants of health. It may be useful to consider these relationships when brainstorming issues

How to Conduct the Forces of Change Assessment

The Forces of Change Assessment assists MAPP users in developing a broad list of forces that is later "funneled" into a more focused list of truly relevant issues. The following three steps don't always follow a linear format; it may be necessary to work back and forth between the steps to develop a list and then whittle it down.

To view case vignettes that illustrate how communities have included Forces of Change in their planning processes, click on any of the following:
Miller County Vignette
East Tennessee Vignette
Chicago, IL Vignette.

Step 1 — Prepare for the Forces of Change Assessment
Unlike the other three MAPP Assessments, this assessment does not require the oversight of a subcommittee. In most cases, the Core Support Team can manage the logistics of the Forces of Change brainstorming session.

It is strongly recommended that the full MAPP Committee participate in the brainstorming session so that a diversity of perspectives is represented. If the MAPP Committee does not reflect sufficiently diverse perspectives, additional participants should be recruited. Individuals from different levels in an organization (front line staff, middle managers, executives) will have different perceptions of issues. Likewise, individuals from disciplines outside of public health can lend important perspectives on emerging forces that affect the health of the community (i.e., a farmer may be aware of impending farm legislation that could affect the community.)

To prepare for the brainstorming session, provide each member of the MAPP Committee with a copy of the Brainstorming Worksheet. Ask them to review the worksheet and begin thinking about the major forces that affect public health or the community. If possible, members should complete the worksheet and bring it to the brainstorming session.

During Step 1, Core Support Team members should:
?? determine who will facilitate the brainstorming session and how it will be run (For more information on identifying an effective facilitator, see the Tip Sheet – Facilitation within the MAPP Process.);
?? review all of the steps and determine the best methods to employ as well as key questions to be asked; and
?? identify a meeting place that offers plenty of empty wallspace (for posting the ideas generated) and space for the committee to break into subgroups.

Step 2 — Convene a brainstorming session to identify forces of change
Next, convene the MAPP Committee and hold a brainstorming session to identify Forces of Change. (This session should be scheduled to last a minimum of two hours.) Through facilitated and structured brainstorming discussions, Committee members should share ideas from their individual Brainstorming Worksheets, identify new forces, and develop a comprehensive list. This is meant to be an intuitive "quick and dirty" process that focuses on events, trends, and factors that come easily to mind. It is at this point that partners are likely to discover the common ground that facilitates team building.

Depending on the size of the group and the amount of time scheduled for the brainstorming session, this step can be completed using either a large group brainstorming process or iterative small group processes. Review local newspaper clippings, national demographics, or recent events to stimulate the brainstorming process. Use questions from the Brainstorming Worksheet to spur discussion.

Once a comprehensive list of forces has been developed, the MAPP Committee should review and fully discuss each item on the list. During the discussion, like forces should be consolidated and organized into logical groups. To develop an organized list, combine forces that are similar or linked (i.e., increasing managed care enrollment and market-based health care system). Other items on the list may need to be deleted, added, or further refined. If there are a small number of forces for specific categories, evaluate why this is the case. It may indicate weak participation from certain segments of the community (e.g., if the business community was not engaged in the process, there may be certain types of forces that were not identified).

If the time allotted for the brainstorming activity does not allow for completion of this step, the Committee may designate staff or a small ad hoc subcommittee to take the first pass at refining the list. Whether the refinement process occurs at the first meeting or a subsequent session, it is an important activity. It was during this activity that one community (Chicago) pared down a list of 75 discrete ideas into fewer than ten categories. Record the information in the first column on the Forces of Change – Threats and Opportunities Worksheet.

There are a variety of ways — such as those described below — to conduct brainstorming sessions. Regardless of the method employed, participants should adhere to the following "golden rule:" Never criticize an idea. Participants will feel free to let their imaginations wander and to contribute if they don't worry about what others will think of their ideas. It is often the case that an idea that initially seems useless or silly subsequently turns out to have value or even trigger another important idea.

Some brainstorming techniques include:
?? **Round Robin Method (or Nominal Group Technique)** — Participants write down all of the forces of change that come to mind (or responses to a specific question). The facilitator or group leader then generates a "master" list of forces by calling on each member in a round-robin fashion. Each member is asked to briefly state one item on his or her list, until all ideas have been presented. The group leader records

these items on a flip chart, using the members' own words. This step may be time-consuming in large groups, but may be shortened by limiting each member to a specific number of ideas. Only after all ideas are presented does the group discuss them. After discussion, the group organizes, clarifies, and simplifies the material. Items should be combined or grouped logically.

?? **A Customization of the Snow Card Technique** Participants write down all of the forces of change that come to mind on small pieces of paper, such as index cards or adhesive notepaper. If desired, the facilitator can ask participants to write down ideas for several identified questions or categories. Participants then post their ideas on the wall (the facilitator can do this, if anonymity is important). The facilitator or a small group of individuals then moves the ideas around, trying to categorize like ideas together. Through this process, multiple categories emerge. The group leader presents the categories to the group, at which time participants have an opportunity to add new ideas to the list or make suggestions for reorganization.

Step 3 — Identify potential threats and opportunities for each force of change
This step should begin with the committee's review of the identified forces, as documented in the first column of the Forces of Change — Threats and Opportunities Worksheet and may occur during the first brainstorming session or a subsequent session. Committee members should evaluate each force, and for each, identify associated threats and opportunities for the community and the local public health system. In some cases, a force might only be identified with a threat, while in other instances, it may be perceived as both a threat and an opportunity. For example:

Force	Threat	Opportunity
Shifting Funding Streams	Uncertain funding for public health activities	New funding streams or new partnerships
Tobacco Settlement Dollars	Funds could supplant regular appropriations, creating dependency of basic services on uncertain settlement dollars	Significant potential funding for health promotion

Using similar brainstorming techniques, identify the threats posed and opportunities created by each force. The final list is recorded in the remaining columns of the Threats and Opportunities Worksheet.

Once this activity has been completed, the forces of change list should be tabled until it is time to conduct the Identify Strategic Issues phase of the MAPP process. Participants will then review each of the issues identified in the other MAPP assessments in light of the forces of change, and will discuss the associated threats and opportunities. This activity will ensure that the strategic issues are relevant to the changing environment. It will also ensure that the action plans developed are responsive to potential threats and opportunities.

The process of identifying forces of change should not end after the initial brainstorming session(s); other forces may later become apparent and should be added to the list as they arise. The Forces of Change phase is intended to be an ongoing process. The MAPP Committee should revisit the list of forces periodically to ensure that it is up to date and that its contents are kept in the forefront of the Committee's mind.

The Importance of Identifying Forces of Change
Miller County, GA Vignette

Miller County, GA, is a small rural county (population: approximately 6,000) located in the southwestern corner of Georgia. When faced with the possible closure of the local hospital in 1997, a coalition of community organizations and representatives initiated a community strategic planning process.

The potential hospital closure was a clearly identified catalyst for initiating the strategic planning activities, providing the impetus for convening partners, obtaining external technical assistance, and designing the process. Closure of the hospital would leave residents without a nearby hospital or emergent care system and represented a possible loss in jobs and economic and population growth for the county. In addition, several other forces were identified that contributed to health care delivery problems in the county. The onset of Medicaid managed care in the state had affected the rural health care system. It also became apparent that a broader "health care crisis" was occurring, in the guise of the rapidly decreasing number of local physicians.

The Miller County Coalition recognized that there were important forces aggravating those that prompted the process. At a strategic planning retreat, a broad range of forces were identified. Some were beneficial to the community, including: 1) a history of success with community-driven projects such as "Swamp Gravy" (a local theater production) and the Tarrer Inn; (a restored historic inn) 2) the recent successful collaboration among community leaders, physicians, the hospital authority, and the public health director; 3) the enthusiastic community spirit; 4) the willingness of community leaders to learn; 5) the agreed-upon plan based on solid information and the support of the "Safety Net Project;" and 6) an internal desire within the state public health system (supported by the district health director) for increased strategic planning.

The coalition also identified forces that threatened to derail the quest for a successful health care system. The most serious potential threat was the failure of the community to work together toward a common vision. Community leaders identified competition for scarce resources, fear of the unknown, lack of communication, hidden personal agendas, turf guarding, negative attitudes, and resistance to change as specific problems that might hinder success. The coalition also feared that leaders responsible for managing the health care system may not have the knowledge and preparation needed to make the new vision a reality, and that this lack of leadership may result in a loss of momentum.

These and other forces affected the process — either by posing obstacles or providing opportunities upon which to build. Many of these forces were recognized by the Miller County Executive Committee (which oversaw the process) or were illuminated by a survey that gathered community perceptions. These forces, and the fact that they were recognized as having an impact on the public health system, helped the Miller County Executive Committee move forward with their eyes open to the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead. The identification of Forces of Change was instrumental in shaping the process and its resulting action plans.

The Importance of Identifying Forces of Change
East Tennessee Regional Health Office Vignette

The East Tennessee Regional Health Office (ETRO) serves a predominantly rural 15-county region. The regional office has oversight responsibilities for the 15 local health departments, which serve a total population of 600,000. Each county conducts a community assessment and planning process that is overseen by local health councils. ETRO — which assists in these efforts — undertook its own internal organization planning process in 1997 in an effort to supplement existing local efforts and devise a plan for moving into the future. As part of this organizational assessment, ETRO assessed the forces of change affecting its community.

ETRO undertook a 12-step process for conducting the assessment — one of which focused on external trends, forces, and contingencies. As part of this process, the agency director developed a survey instrument to gather input from ETRO staff and others. Two items related to forces of change were included on the survey:
1. Identify those trends/forces/contingencies in the external environment that could have the most significant impact on your organization over the next five years. You should focus on your organization's economic, social, political-regulatory, and technological-scientific domains.
2. Over the next five years, what are four of the most unexpected external occurrences that could happen outside of your organization that could have a significant impact on it?

After gathering individual responses to the survey, the director and a core group of staff compiled and analyzed responses. The forces identified as "most important" were: technology, changing demographics, and health care reform. ETRO recognized that these and other trends had prompted the regional organizational assessment and had brought the need for more planning into focus. (For example, a shift in primary care services was caused by the rise in federally-funded and private primary care centers. The 1994 implementation of TennCare, the state's Medicaid managed care program, also caused changes in primary care services as well as within the Tennessee public health infrastructure.) Lastly, a significant amount of funding was shifted from Tennessee's Department of Health to support TennCare. Since then, many local public health departments have refocused efforts on outreach and assurance of care (reimbursable services), as opposed to providing direct services.

ETRO is continuing with its organizational and community planning at both the county and regional levels, relying on the identification of these factors and forces to help both processes.

Forces of Change Assessment
Chicago, IL Vignette

As one component of its analysis, the Chicago Partnership worked to identify forces and trends that pose potential threats or opportunities for public health in Chicago. At their May 1999 meeting, members were asked to take home and complete a simple three-column worksheet on which they could list forces and trends in public health and threats posed and opportunities related to each of these.

Members returned their completed worksheets by fax to project staff. In all, more than 75 forces and trends were identified. Without changing the text of the submissions, staff consolidated the input onto a single worksheet on which the forces and trends were grouped under 11 larger categories. This allowed the Partnership to identify forces where members had shared concerns (those appearing with greater frequency).

While an effort was made to discuss the document in full at the Chicago Partnership's June meeting, the number of issues identified and the members' interest in broader deliberations prompted the scheduling of a three-hour meeting the following month. At that time, the Chicago Partnership analyzed and debated points raised in the document in great detail, offering additions in some areas and challenging assumptions in others. They also elected to consolidate some of the 11 categories. This meeting resulted in significant revisions to both the organization and substance of the document. In the end, the Partnership had identified eight categories of forces/trends:

- Lack of public health constituency
- Shifting funding streams and focus
- Governmental role in public health
- Health status disparities
- Health care system changes
- Emerging public health issues
- The aging population
- Economic development

Once there was consensus on the substance and organization of the worksheet document, staff drafted a 14-page narrative reflecting the full detail from the Partnership's July discussion. With the Partnership's review and subsequent revisions, the narrative was included in the final public health systems improvement plan.

See Chicago Forces of Change Example to view a section of the brainstorming worksheet.